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Martin Mador, Legislative Chair

Public Health Committee  
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Testimony In Favor of  
HB 6519 AAC The Labeling Of Genetically Engineered Food

I am Martin Mador, 130 Highland Ave., Hamden, CT 06518. I am the volunteer Legislative Chair for the Connecticut Chapter of the Sierra Club. I hold a Masters of Environmental Management degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

The Sierra Club feels that the intentional and knowing introduction of toxics into our environment is very much an environmental issue.

The accumulating evidence indicates that GMO engineered foods may pose a significant health threat. Rigorous studies are not available, on either humans or animals, because the manufacturers of GMO seeds, which are patented, steadfastly refuse to release them for medical and scientific research.

What exactly is HB 6519? The bill is not about restricting the sale of GMO foods. It is not about agricultural practices, either in Connecticut or nationwide. It is not about disadvantaging our farmers. It is not about closing our borders. It is not about regulation at all. It is *only* about giving Connecticut consumers the ability, if they so choose, to limit their exposure to foods containing GMOs. To do this, of course, they must be able to know what is in the food offered them for retail purchase. The labeling requirement of this bill does exactly that, and only that.

I often hear that GMO labeling should be a federal, nationwide, requirement. And, in theory, I agree. However, we all know about the gridlock in Washington. Until that is resolved, there is virtually no chance of action at the federal level. So, for now, we are creating a de facto federal standard by crafting uniform legislation in states across the country. We are working with colleagues in 37 states to pass a state level GMO labeling requirement. As of today, we know of 73 GMO labeling bills introduced in 26 states. We hope that passage of these bills across the country will act as an incentive for the federal government to establish an appropriate and effective national standard, but we have no optimism this will happen soon.

So for now we look to the state legislature to enable us to make decisions we feel will protect our health. Each of us must take responsibility for the health and safety of ourselves and our families. This is not possible without the ability to know what is in the food we are bringing home.

We are slowly moving towards adopting the Precautionary Principle, prevalent in Europe, which teaches that the time to take action is when we're pretty sure, based on information available, that there is a hazard, rather than waiting for conclusive evidence of the highest standard. Many of us feel that Principle now applies to GMO food.

The Connecticut Chapter of the Sierra Club voted this winter to make GMO labeling a priority issue for our 2013 agenda. We strongly endorse this bill as we do the bill on children and baby food (HB6527) passed by the Children's Committee earlier this week. We praise the committee for raising it.